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ABSTRACT

An Elementary and Secondary Education Act Title III program for attacking education problems in the rural areas of Pinal County, Arizona, is described in this report. The program serves approximately 3,174 children in grades K through 8, many of whom are minorities. Included in the program are these resource or supplementary components: a math consultant to conduct a testing program that would identify and correct individual math deficiencies; a reading consultant to increase individual reading achievement; a language component to provide speech therapy and language awareness lessons; a cultural component; and a home/school visitor to furnish a link between homes and schools. A part-time psychologist aids the other consultants and school district personnel in identifying learning disabilities that are psychological rather than physical. It is noted that the project could be duplicated in other rural school districts in Arizona as well as other states. (PS)

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Attacking Education Problems in Rural Schools

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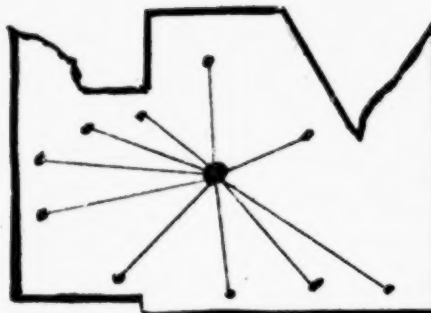


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Eleven Mile Corner
Oracle
Stanfield
Picacho
Maricopa
Kenilworth
Toltec
Red Rock
Sacaton
St. Peter's Mission
J. O. Combs



AN ESEA TITLE III PROJECT
Funded Through The
Pinal County School Office
Mary C. O'Brien, Superintendent
Dwight I. Smith, Project Director

ARIZONA
Department of Education
W. P. Shofstall, Ph. D., Superintendent

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Pinal County's "Attacking Education Problems in Rural Schools"

by Ramona Weeks

Once upon a time, in a county in the far West, lived thousands of shivering valentines. They needed gloves, love, attention, and incentive -- a reason to want to go to school and learn. Some shivered because they were cold; others shivered because they were afraid.

If you believed in fairy godmothers, one would undoubtedly appear on the scene at this juncture, wave her wand, and the three thousand valentines -- elementary school students in this case -- would perk up, become cheerful, and hand in "A" papers, every one.

Of course, there are no fairy godmothers.

Wanna bet?

Drop by Mrs. Montoya's third grade classroom, one of a row of barracks-like rooms built of red brick in the flatland cattle and farming community of Stanfield, Arizona. Billy, age 9, part Papago and part Mexican, sits at a low round table with two Anglo children. Billy's face is animated as he cuts shapes out of construction paper, then uses a boarding house reach to grab the pastepot.

"You should have seen him two months ago," confides the teacher. "Very withdrawn socially, and extremely shy. He wouldn't participate in any activity, in or out of the classroom. He and his brother have deformed feet." Mrs. Montoya's face brightens. "But you should see the change in him now!"

Just what is the change?

"Now -- well, now, he is independent. He isn't afraid to do things before the class and go to the blackboard if I ask him to."

The teacher's eyes rested on Billy for a moment. Then she looked back at a visitor and at Virginia Delsi, the home/school liaison visitor for Stanfield Elementary School, as well as for ten other elementary schools served by a Pinal County project funded under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which is aimed at providing new solutions to persistent problems in education.

"Virginia went to work and somehow found corrective shoes for both the boys! It made all the difference. We need six more like her!"

The teacher has asked Virginia Delsi to stop by on her weekly visit to Stanfield Elementary School. The teacher has a referral, which means another home visit that Virginia must fit into her already crowded schedule. "Can you do it?" asks the teacher.

"Sure," Virginia responds instantly. "Who is it?"

The problem concerns Teddy, a conscientious student in the class who was severely burned three weeks previously. Teddy, a good, steady student, has missed all his classes since the freak accident.

The teacher wants to know if there is anything the school can do to help. "Maybe we can send work home so he could keep up with the class. Will you ask his parents for me?"

Virginia Delsi says she will find out.

A delicate looking Mexican-American girl, 8, steps forward and touches Virginia shyly. The child's name is Dolores, and she remembers that Virginia has visited her home -- a ramshackle, three room migrant worker hut occupied by the girl, her five brothers and sisters (two of whom are mentally handicapped), and their parents.

En route to Dolores' house, the home/school liaison visitor quickly sketches the family's background. The father has a service connected disability. He is not supposed to work more than three hours per day. But some days he labors for fourteen grueling hours in the cotton fields to earn \$1.60 per hour. On this sum, with the aid of commodity foods, the Rodriguez family barely scrape by.

Dolores' teachers have complained that the child is not always clean and that her clothes are often dirty. Driving into a dirt road beside the Boll Weevil Tavern, Virginia halts the car by the second of eight workers' shacks.

Mrs. Rodriguez speaks very little English, except for words like "rent," "welfare," and "free." She stands in a faded housedress, clutching a sweater about her thin body to ward off the cold. The temperature in the plasterboard dwelling is around 45 degrees. The landlord, she says, who is also her husband's employer, turns off the heat and electricity in the vermin ridden shack -- all of them -- at seven p.m. He tells the tenants they "use too much."

It's hard to bathe six children and keep their clothes detergent-commercial clean under these circumstances. Mrs. Rodriguez keeps her eyes fixed on the home/school visitor as she talks rapidly in Spanish. Virginia Delsi, a Mexican-American born in Nogales, Arizona, and herself the mother of five, nods gently as she tries to reassure the mother in Spanish.

Last week, says Mrs. Rodriguez, she killed a dozen mice in the oven. Cockroaches cluster boldly in the daylight all over the house. The ground is visible through gaping holes in the floorboards. Coiled springs protruding from the few pieces of upholstered furniture, and the makeshift beds are covered with threadbare blankets. Pointing

to the gashes in the ceiling and walls, the holes in the floor, Mrs. Rodriguez suggests that perhaps the school people would like to come out and tell her how she can do better.

Mrs. Delsi says she will do what she can to communicate the Rodriguez family situation to school officials. And, yes, she will try to see whether Robert, a sixteen-year-old special education student, cannot be paid for the janitorial work he does.

Even though the home/school visitor may not be able to do much about this problem, Mrs. Rodriguez feels better, just knowing that someone is interceding on her behalf.

As home/school liaison visitor in the Pinal County Program, it falls to Virginia Delsi to interpret the teachers' problems to the parents, to take these directly to the parents and listen to their side of the story, and to pull together sources of help to alleviate home troubles that may be adversely affecting a child's schoolwork. The problems range from an infestation of lice and nits among Papago school children at Cocklebur Village, ten miles south of Stanfield, to finding an agency that will provide orthopedic shoes, to arranging transportation and appointments for a child to visit a dentist or an ophthalmologist.

Mrs. Delsi's work is only one part of the special Title III program presently underway in Pinal County, which lies just south of populous Maricopa County and Phoenix, the State capitol. Sprawling Pinal County is the third most populous county in the state. It has numerous poverty pockets, and there are large numbers of Indian families with an average annual income of \$1,500 or less and many families of migrant workers. Other than cattle raising and shipping and cotton growing and ginning, there is little industry in the area.

This is the second year of the project, which has no catchy acronym, but is titled simply: "Attacking Education Problems in Rural Schools." Approximately 3,174 children in grades K-8 are affected by the program, which is administered through the Pinal County School Superintendent's office, in Florence. Miss Mary C. O'Brien, Superintendent, has lived in the area for approximately thirty (30) years. It was she and one administrator in particular, Mr. M. D. (Mike) Geraghty of Stanfield who saw the need for a collective effort and helped get the ball rolling.

According to Miss O'Brien, small isolated school districts must find ways to strengthen education programs and yet retain their individuality. Small districts usually lack the solid tax basis necessary to furnish them with adequate funding.

Isolation causes special student needs. In Pinal County are large concentrations of minority ethnic groups. Three fourths of the 275 square mile Gila River Indian reservation lies in Pinal County, for example. Five thousand Pima and Maricopa Indians live on the reservation, scattered for the most part in four communities.

A widowed Papago mother of two living in Cocklebur Village with no gas, electricity, or running water, and a monthly income of \$156, must pay a neighbor \$5.00 to take her school age daughter to the Bureau of Indian Affairs hospital at Sacaton, over

twenty-five miles away. (The neighbors are not venal: those with cars, however, can barely manage the gasoline and upkeep.) Usually, the mother cannot afford the transportation. The daughter continues to huddle in a blanket beside the woodburning stove in the mud floor house, her recovery slowed by lack of medication and an inadequate diet.

Cultural and ethnic differences create educational problems for students. An ethnic representation chart of the eleven schools would show that the overall enrollment consists of 35 per cent white children, 35 per cent Indian, 25 per cent Mexican-American, 4 per cent black, and 1 per cent other.

Project Director, Dwight Smith, and others in the effort realize that it is difficult to alter a child's home environment. "But," emphasizes Smith, "we feel that by trying our darnedest, we can bring about changes that will at least reduce the severity of the problems here."

Virginia next calls on Teddy, the boy with the burns. She reassures him, ruffles his hair, and tells the mother that she could deliver special lessons in order that the boy may keep up with his class. The mother is grateful and the boy beaming.

On to another referral. Two twin Papago boys have been reported to the home school visitor as habitual absentees. Virginia Delsi's visit to their home elicits the information that the boys are reluctant to give their names in order to receive permission to go to the restroom. Virginia will report this information back to Superintendent M. D. Geraghty and to the boys' teachers for consideration. The problem will be investigated.

Teachers also have many needs that are tough to meet in small, remote school districts. Project activities are aimed at these needs, at furnishing the remedial help and supplementary services that the teachers often lack -- and want. Title III project personnel conduct workshops especially planned to keep teachers aware of new curricula and materials in various subject areas.

That's what the project is doing. How did it all come about?

In the spring of 1970, administrators of several small rural schools in Pinal County allied together in an effort to find ways of meeting common educational needs. They agreed that the project should include at least the following resource or supplementary components:

A math consultant to conduct a testing program that would identify and help correct individual student math deficiencies. Formally and informally, through workshops and teacher consultations on methods and materials, the math consultant would tailor programs aimed at improving student math performance.

A reading consultant would work to bolster individual student achievement in reading, with special deficiencies determined by diagnostic and comparative testing.

A language component was set up to make speech therapy available to students in grades 4 through 8. Students in grades K - 2 receive language awareness lessons to improve their speech patterns and familiarize them with the spoken language. As a speech therapist, the language specialist would screen students referred by teachers and follow a set therapy schedule.

A cultural component was planned, which in actuality evolved into a music component. The consultant helps the eleven schools afford opportunities to students to participate in music activities that will widen their aesthetic horizons. Enjoyment and appreciation of music are the goals.

The home/school visitor, although a paraprofessional, was regarded as an essential part of the program by administrators and Miss O'Brien. This person would furnish a vital link between homes and schools as she called on families of children who exhibited problems in classes with behavior, social relationships, academic performance, attendance, and so forth.

To see more specifically how the consultant program works, let us look in on a class at St. Peter's Mission School at Bapchule, Arizona. (An interesting aspect of this Title III project is that one of the schools it serves is a parochial school.) St. Peter's Mission School is located approximately thirty-five miles south of Phoenix on the Gila River Indian reservation. In a compound of rammed earth structures, the school is located on a newly blacktopped road six miles off Interstate 10 in the mudhut community of Bapchule. Parents pay \$2.00 per year for their children to attend the mission school, which has an enrollment of 250-plus students, in grades K - 8.

This morning, Russ Andaloro, the music consultant, is visiting a combination third and fourth grade class taught by an enthusiastic young nun, Sister Martha Mary. Andaloro, a former professional musician with a wealth of practical knowledge as well as teaching experience, literally wheedles music out of the children.

The 26 students in the class -- two Anglo boys, whose fathers work at the BIA hospital in nearby Sacaton, one half-Papago girl, and the majority being Pima and Maricopa Indians -- remove their flutophones from plastic bags and fumble through papers in cubbyholes below their desks to locate music sheets. They keep their eyes on Andaloro as he cajoles, taps, claps, and conducts a song. "D-D-D-D-DDD," he intones. "Three fingers up. Three fingers down." He demonstrates.

Andaloro whisks the class through several songs. It is close to Christmas, and he leads a rattling version of "Jolly Old St. Nicholas." Then, in an attempt to help the class differentiate among full, half, and quarter notes, he propels the students into a rendition of "Jingle Bells," with its short-short-long, short-short, long measures.

Counting, listening, pointing to one aisle of children whose notes sound faintly sour, he says, "Let's hear that again." The children oblige. "Again." This time they are right, and they beam with pleasure at the consultant's praise.

Next, Andaloro rummages through a box containing drum pads, sticks, xylophones, music sheets, and triumphantly produces eight melody bells. Each is a different color and produces a note on the middle C octave.

Andaloro beckons one aisle of eight students to the front of the classroom, doles out the colored bells, demonstrating the wrist motion that will produce a loud and resounding tinkle. Each child shakes his wrist and bell vigorously, imitating the consultant. The colored bells produce a cacaphony of sound when rung all at once; separately, as Andaloro points to each child in turn they sort themselves magically into a do-re-mi scale.

The consultant leads them through "Jingle Bells," then through "Mary Had a Little Lamb" and "London Bridge," pointing to various children for the desired note. One boy, clutching the "re" bell, jumps the gun several times and joins his classmates in laughing at his mistake.

The cumulative effect is rousing. The children are enthusiastic about the bells. Andaloro promises to bring them another day.

The teacher thanks him warmly, and Andaloro is off to another session: this time, he meets with kindergarteners and first and second graders. He takes them through rhythms -- clapping, nodding -- teaching the children to thump Quaker Oats boxes in simple rhythmic exercises. This is a prelude to more sophisticated musical activities in later grades.

The children eagerly anticipate the music consultant's visit, according to Sister Martha Mary. On the days he visits, the inspired students bang out tunes on the rusted pipes of playground swings during lunch and rest periods, and occasionally burst into song. That afternoon they ask for a second music session.

At J. O. Combs School, a rural school just outside Queen Creek, Arizona, Andaloro works with a teacher in readying a group to perform a Western number at the annual music fiesta. Last year's fiesta, the first, involved approximately five-hundred students from project schools and was received with enthusiasm. Rehearsals are well underway for the second, which will be held during May in the auditorium of Casa Grande High School.

The Combs fifth Graders are planning a Western tableau, practicing swaggers and ways of lounging around a make-believe campfire. Wagon wheels, saddles draped picturesquely on sawhorses, and a backdrop of twinkling stars will set the atmosphere, while the children assume poses of cowboys and cowgirls taking it easy after a dinner of son-of-a-gun stew. One will twirl a rope; another may plait a bridle. Seven will play mouth organs; three will play melodicas; and six will strum guitars, all to the tune of "On Top of Old Smoky," while the rest sing or prepare for another

Western special.

Andaloro teaches all instruments -- wind, percussion, and string. It's fortunate that he does! As music consultant in the Pinal County Title III project, he must be multi-talented, imaginative, and flexible.

This was underscored at Kenilworth School last spring when Andaloro was preparing fifth and sixth graders for the fiesta. The school has a large enrollment of black students, and the Kenilworth pupils had their own ideas concerning how best to fill their niche on the program. Andaloro found them dancing to rock and roll records.

"One was doing the chicken; another was doing the frug. And over here, somebody was giving with the Funky Broadway; over there it was The Bump." Andaloro lifts expressive Italian eyebrows as he describes the scene. "So, I said to myself, 'why not?'" The Kenilworth students, bumping and frugging, were a major hit at the first music fiesta. In the words of one observer, "They wiggled everything that was wiggleable!"

Music appreciation is also part of the music component, and Andaloro sneaks in bits of all kinds of music, from classical to modern. During the fall of 1971, for example, he persuaded a mariachi group, complete with black sombreros and silver-studded black costumes, as well as a contemporary jazz choir, to perform at three project schools: Toltec, Picacho, and Red Rock. The mariachis and the jazz singers were students at Central Arizona College, located near the heart of Pinal County.

They performed with polish and verve; and the Latin gaiety of the mariachi musicians reinforced the ethnic pride of the many Mexican American students at these schools. The black students were able to take pride in and identify with the jazz musicians. It was, all in all, a successful venture in music appreciation.

The Casa Grande High School concert band has performed "longhair" music at the schools, widening the gamut of listening experiences.

Language consultant for the project is Barbara Russell, recently of Dodge City, Kansas. (Her former residence, famed for its association with such Western heroes as Bat Masterson, gives her great prestige in the eyes of many of the students she works with, reports Mrs. Russell, as well as with her own five children.) She is the only speech therapist whose services are available to the project schools.

On a typical day, visiting the schools on a rotating basis, Mrs. Russell may see twenty students in therapy at each school. They arrive in clusters of three, four, or five. They have been assigned to these groups according to their language handicap. The major difficulty most have is with articulation (forming certain vowels or consonants and pronouncing them correctly). Ninety-three percent of those screened in the 1970-71 school year had articulation problems.

Mrs. Russell sees those with "l" problems in one session; those with "r" problems in another; essays she says, seem to pose the most difficulty.

During her visit to the Oracle School, Mrs. Russell sees twenty-three students in five therapy sessions. Since the majority of these were mispronouncing esses coming out, usually, with a lisp or "th" sound -- she devises drills which require the students to pronounce words containing this letter.

Picture cards are dealt to each child; and he is asked to make up a story or sentence about the item illustrated on the card. One reticent girl is scarcely audible on her first turn, and has to be prompted. But, when the second card is handed to her, and she has heard her friends reel off brief sentences, she speaks up, holding the picture of the swing so that the others may see it. "I like to swing," she says gleefully; and claps one hand over her mouth to hide a giggle.

A boy in a session at St. Peter's Mission plays the game very well. Martinez is a fourth grader and is nearly ready for dismissal from the therapy sessions, according to Mrs. Russell.

"We eat bananas," says Martinez rapidly after viewing a picture card showing the yellow, crescent-shaped fruit. He takes the second card with aplomb. "My father lost the keys," he says after studying it.

Martinez also plays the "Sammy Snake" game with facility. This is a game invented by Barbara Russell to serve her special needs. A three inch circle, on which there is the sinuous figure of Sammy Snake mimeographed in purple ink, is fastened with a brad to a larger paper circle. On the outside rim of the large circle are pictures of several objects. As the child turns the smaller circle, the objects wheel into the range of Sammy Snake's vision.

"Sammy Snake sees a sock," says Martinez. "Sammy Snake sees a soda." He stumbles only over "scal," which is unfamiliar to him. He repeats the word perfectly when it is supplied to him, and breezes ahead. "Sammy Snake sees a saw."

That same day, Barbara Russell will conduct as many as four language appreciation classes at St. Peter's and at the Sacaton Public School. These are designed to foster good reading habits in the children to make them aware of how words sound when read aloud and to reinforce correct pronunciations.

At another school, Red Rock, forty-some miles away from Sacaton, she will hold therapy sessions with another twelve to fourteen students, screen three or four others to determine their speech problems, and perhaps hold conferences with a parent, a teacher, or the school nurse.

"I do not," she says firmly, "take into therapy any students whose front teeth are missing! You can't tell whether they have a speech problem or not!"

Barbara Russell estimates that she works in therapy with 125 students each week. The need is apparent, and she deplores only her lack of time and the almost overwhelming task of trying to screen over three thousand students. She drives over 1,660 miles per month in the course of her work, as do all of the other consultants in the project.

The reading component is made up of two part-time consultants: Mrs. Mary Lou Smith and Mr. Dale Hayes.

Since joining the project in October, 1971, Mary Lou Smith has worked at becoming acquainted with teachers and administrators and, through chats at coffee breaks and after school, she has developed an awareness of the kinds of help the teachers need.

On a typical day, she may observe remedial reading classes, set up after consultations with teachers and individual testing of students. In an informal conference after school one day, Mrs. Smith called the attention of the teachers to the new Children's Television Workshop series, "The Electric Company," which is aimed at reading improvement; and asked the teachers to suggest topics for formal discussion at an upcoming workshop.

Driving to Sacaton -- tribal headquarters of the Pima and center of a thriving Model Cities program -- Mrs. Smith visits the high-ceilinged library, still in the old BIA day school building, and chats with the librarians; and confers with one or more teachers, leaving sample materials for them to experiment with.

Usually her activities include a discussion with those teachers in charge of first grade remedial reading. To them, she recommends motor, audio, and visual perceptual training for children with various problems.

The important thing, to Mrs. Smith as to the others, is that the teachers should "know I am there to help."

Hayes' schedule is similar to Mrs. Smith's, except that he visits a different group of schools. He discusses with the principals their wishes concerning reading goals and objectives, observes classes, and makes recommendations aimed at strengthening the thrust of the reading effort.

Dwight Smith, the project's director, also serves the eleven schools three-quarters of his time as math consultant. He introduces new texts and workbooks to teachers and follows up to get their opinions regarding adoption of the material for text use. If a child is having difficulty with a math book, Smith checks to see whether remedial reading is called for, and may consult with Mrs. Smith or Mr. Hayes. He works with teachers and children in using Cuisenaire rods (wooden sticks and oblong blocks keyed to number values by color and size) and other math materials.

He holds workshops showing teachers the possible uses of centimeter rods, balance beams, tangrams; and so on. He also conducts demonstrations of tutorial and mutual assistance grouping.

A part time psychologist aids the other consultants and school district personnel in identifying learning disabilities that are psychological rather than physical. The psychologist recommends activities that may be therapeutic, and evaluates students for possible referral to special education classes.

A complete battery of tests in all areas was administered to pupils in project schools

during 1971-72. Follow up tests in the spring of 1972 will determine their progress and help those working in the project determine whether the objectives have been met.

Unquestionably, the Pinal County project could be duplicated in other rural school districts in Arizona as well as in other states. The project's external auditor, in his initial summary comment, stated:

This is a straightforward elementary program in special services and basic education subjects which would have application in other school districts. The special thrust of this project is demonstration of programs and technique.

Several factors outside the measurable results make the Pinal County project unique:

The faith of the Pinal County School Superintendent, Mary O'Brien, who recalls the county as segregated clusters of whites, blacks, Indians, and Mexicans prior to and following World War II. Over the years, owing in large part to her efforts and those of many others, mutual suspicions have dissipated. White students participate eagerly in "soul music" events; blacks, Indians, and chicanos display avid interest in jug band music, music with roots in the white agrarian south.

When the consultants and the project director huddle together to see what can be done about the abysmal living conditions of a family, that is proof of the project's viability.

When project kids on a field trip see a zoo -- or a supermarket -- or hear a live band for the first time, their sights have been lifted.

When an Indian mother hesitantly agrees to send her five-year-old to the preschool program at one of the schools; and when the boy (a dropout from a Head Start school) attends, at first reluctantly and then eagerly, taking books with bright pictures and crude, but colorful puppets home to show his younger brother and sister -- the project indeed may be called a success "on the road."

Barbara Russell has developed a finger play stressing "v" sounds, utilizing a rhyme about five shivering valentines in a box. The rhyme concludes:

"Do you think the valentines are lonesome living there?
Maybe they need you and me and lots of love and care."